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"Everyone understands that water is essential to life. But many are only just now beginning to grasp how essential it is to everything in life - food, energy, transportation, nature, leisure, identity, culture, social norms, and virtually all the products used on a daily basis." – World Business Council for Sustainable Development

In November 2006, McHenry County completed a multi-year water resources study with Baxter and Woodman titled the "Groundwater Resources Management Plan." This plan concluded that there are several aspects of groundwater concerns in McHenry County.

The first concern is the primary impact of increased groundwater pumping on the existing finite water supply.

Second is the potential for groundwater contamination that grows proportionally with population increase and corresponding increases in business activity. Finally, a less evident but nevertheless important aspect of groundwater use is the potential impact on natural wetlands, fens, streams and lakes.

It was decided that a water resources manager should be hired in 2007 to coordinate the development of a groundwater protection program for the county. In April 2007, I was hired to lead this effort. In many areas of the United States, groundwater resource planning traditionally has been a top down process with little or no stakeholder involvement. However, in Illinois, with the absence of statutory authority, counties are unable to enforce groundwater ordinances in areas other than the unincorporated.

Therefore, McHenry County recognizes the value of a cooperative planning process which encourages the involvement of local government leaders, regional partners, special interest groups, businesses, and citizens in the development of a county-wide groundwater protection program.

People are more likely to support that which they help to create.

We all feel the growing pains in McHenry County on a daily basis with our congested roads and crowded classrooms. But what most don't realize is that our growth puts an equal strain on our groundwater supply. It is projected that from 2000 to 2030, McHenry County's population will grow by 190,000 with the number of households projected to increase by approximately 65,700. In 2000, water use in the county amounted to an annual average of 34.6 million gallons a day (mgd). By 2030, average annual water use is estimated to almost double to 67.5 mgd.

In July 2007, the Groundwater Protection Program Task Force was assembled to work toward a program that will protect the quantity and quality of the groundwater in

McHenry County for our generation and future generations. During the October meeting, the task force held a brainstorming session to come up with a list of priorities to work on.

From this list of ideas, the task force combined like ideas into 12 subject specific topics to address. To see a listing of the topics visit our Web site at [www.mchenryh2o.com](http://www.mchenryh2o.com).

Since October, the Task Force has divided the topics into three groupings that are scheduled to conclude in October. A few goals of each subcommittee include: identify existing policies that address your topic, identify what we should be doing, and make recommendations to the task force based on your findings. With this, the first round of subcommittees presented their findings and policy recommendations to the task force during the February meeting. Their final reports can be viewed on the Water Resources Web site. The second round of subcommittees will conclude in June and the final round will conclude in October, with a plan completion and implementation date of Spring 2009.

The final plan will contain model ordinances. It is the hope of the county that these will be adopted and implemented by all the municipalities and townships around the county. As the The Land Conservancy of McHenry County states on its Web site, "We have the opportunity in McHenry County to meet current and future water needs with the water resources that are available to us right beneath our feet – if we plan for it. Planning must include preserving water quality as well as managing supply and demand."

The Groundwater Protection Program Task Force has been meeting monthly for eight months and working toward the development of a comprehensive Groundwater Protection Program, ensuring a coordinated effort addressing the issues impacting our water resources on a countywide basis. For more information on the GPP Task Force please refer to the Web site. Finally, meetings are held at the County Administration Building, on Ware Road, on the second Tuesday of every month at 2 p.m. These meetings are open to the public. The complete calendar can be found on Water Resources Web site.

- Cassandra McKinney is the McHenry County Water Resource Manager.